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Intergroup Relations and Muslims' Mental Health in Western Societies

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### Abstract

This review article proposes that theories and research of intergroup contact, prejudice, and acculturation, enhance understanding of the current intercultural relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in Western societies, such as in Australia. The actual and perceived prejudice that many Muslims studying, working, and living in the West have been experiencing following the 2001 terrorist attacks, adds an additional layer of stress to the psychosocial adjustment of Muslim immigrants and sojourners, affecting their cross-cultural adaptation and mental health. Stephan and colleagues' Integrated Threat Theory argues that the perceived threat experienced by all parties, explains the acts of prejudice. Berry's acculturation framework highlights that adaptive acculturation is determined by congruent host nation policies and practices and immigrant acculturation strategies. Implications for multicultural policy, intercultural training, and mental health practice, and suggestions for future research, are discussed.

## Intergroup Relations and Muslims' Mental Health in Western Societies

The greatest contemporary and contentious intergroup relations issue, on an international scale, is between Muslims and non-Muslims in the West. Two key changes have occurred since the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in the United States of America on September 11 2001 (9/11), which were tragically followed by the targeted attacks on Westerners in Bali in 2002, Madrid in 2004, London in 2005 and Mumbai in 2008. Firstly, Islam and Muslims have come under the international spotlight (Dunn, Klocker, & Salabay, 2007; Kevin, Natascha, & Tanya, 2007; Mark, 2005; Maslen, 2001; National Observer, 2005; Noble, 2005). Muslims have been scrutinized by individuals, politicians, security forces and the media, and this has occurred at global, national, group and personal levels (Lewis, 2006; Pollak, 2006). They have also been subjected to greater levels of prejudice and discrimination, whether direct or indirect, actual or perceived, overt or covert. Secondly, everyone and particularly Westerners feel threatened by this tragic series of terrorist attacks that were perpetrated by a small number of extremists. This threat emanated from the acts of a few and has manifested as problematic intergroup relations between mainstream Muslims and non-Muslims in Western societies.

There are consequences to these strained intergroup relations. At an international level there would be an impact on foreign affairs and global markets such as education, trade, entertainment, sport and tourism, which directly affect the economy of a nation particularly during the current international financial crisis (Chossudovsky, 2008). At a local level these relations would have a bearing on the social, political and economic landscape of a nation as well as the social cohesion of the community as a whole. Moreover, there would be an impact on Muslim individuals' sense of belonging, wellbeing and mental health.

*Focus and Framework of the Present Review Article*

This paper will focus on the review of the literature on intergroup relations and Muslims' mental health in Western societies, particularly in Australia where harmonious relations matter to individual Muslims and the society as a whole, and where the authors are based. A cohesive society and the wellbeing of all its citizens, as well as the financial stability of the economy, should be of paramount importance to all governments.

In order to understand the gravity of the difficulties and stress Muslims are currently facing and the impact this may have on their mental health, we will begin our paper by reviewing recent evidence that Muslims in Western societies have been subjected to direct or indirect acts of prejudice, and social exclusion. Then we will review the relevant major intergroup contact and prejudice theories and their associated research, which will provide a better understanding about intergroup attitudes towards and prejudice against Muslims. We will follow the review of these generic models of intergroup relations with a discussion of the research literature on the impact of prejudice on the mental health of Muslims in Western societies.

This paper will then review relevant acculturation and stress theories and research, which can be applied to enhance understanding of the societal and personal determinants of the psychosocial adjustment and mental health of Muslims, particularly immigrants and sojourners, living in the West. Then we will discuss the tenets and applications of the sociocultural adaptation research, drawing from the culture learning perspective.

Importantly, drawing on the literature reviewed, we will offer a discussion of the implications for social policy and practice with a view to improving intergroup relations, increasing intercultural understanding and communication, and enhancing the adjustment and mental health of Muslims in Western education and work settings. The paper will end with suggestions for future research based on our review of existing theories and literature, as well as applied research on needs assessment and evaluation of multicultural policies and practice.

*Islam in the West since the Terrorist Attacks in 2001*

The religion of Islam and the Muslims who practise it, have been under the international spotlight, since the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States of America by Islamic extremists in 2001. Muslims have come under scrutiny from the media, police, security forces and politicians, and have become victims of ethnic targeting throughout the world (Poynting & Mason, 2006, 2007). Even the United Nations interjected the debate, when Kofi Annan (Annan, 2004), the then Secretary-General called for tolerance and understanding towards Muslims in an address in New York.

The unfortunate term of Islamophobia flourished in the media, and became part of everyday language. In light of the growing anti-Muslim sentiments, the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) commissioned several reports on Islamophobia. One report (EUMC, 2006) aptly stated the following:

The disadvantaged position of Muslim minorities, evidence of a rise in Islamophobia and concern over processes of alienation and radicalization have triggered an intense debate in the European Union regarding the need for re-examining community cohesion and integration policies. The central question is how to avoid stereotypical generalizations, how to reduce fear and how to strengthen cohesion in our diverse European societies while countering marginalization and discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion or belief...Discrimination against Muslims can be attributed to Islamophobic attitudes, as much as to racist and xenophobic resentments, as these elements are in many cases inextricably intertwined. (p. 3).

Anti-Muslim sentiments throughout Europe have been reported in Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, the Slovak Republic, Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Allen & Nielsen, 2002; EUMC, 2006).

These reports provide numerous examples of racist and religiously aggravated crimes against Muslim people and include attacks against fast-food stands, campaigns by public officials/political parties, desecration of mosques and cemeteries, threats and verbal abuse where some has been aimed at women wearing hijab (a traditional headscarf), production of anti-Muslim leaflets being distributed, graffiti targeted at mosques, Islamic schools and Muslim-owned shops.

Other reported incidents include the desecration of graves of WW II Muslim veterans (Voice of America News, 2008), attacks on Muslim children who were told by their perpetrators that they were seeking retribution for the 7 July 2005 terrorist bombings in London (Poynting & Mason, 2006), and racial taunts to a Muslim football player at a London match (Staff Writer, 2008). The EUMC (2006) summarizes the key point by stating, "Whether there are daily forms of racism and discrimination or more violent forms, Islamophobia is a violation of human rights and a threat to social cohesion" (p. 61).

Recent national surveys in Canada (Adams, 2009) and Western Europe (Pew Research Center, 2006) have shown large variation among Muslims' perceptions of hostility from the Western society in which they live. These perceptions ranged from a relatively low 17% of Canadian Muslims, through to 31% of Spanish Muslims, 39% in France, 42% in Great Britain, to a high of 51% in Germany. According to the 2007 Environics Survey reported by Adams (2009), 81% of Canadian Muslims expressed satisfaction with life in Canada, reporting that Muslims were better off in Canada than in the European nations surveyed by Pew Research Center (2006). However, 30% of Canadian Muslims (higher among those aged 18 to 29, and also among women) reported experiences of discrimination in the previous two years. This proportion was comparable to reports of negative experiences related to ethnicity or religion from Spanish (25%), British (28%), and French (37%) Muslims.

The above observations highlight the global extent of the prejudice and social exclusion Muslims are currently facing in their local environments on a regular basis. In a Canadian study examining a hierarchy of acceptability and comfort level ratings for ethnocultural groups, participants rated Arabs, Muslims, Indo-Pakistanis and Sikhs as the bottom four on the provided list (Berry, 2006), thus providing recent empirical support for the negative perception of Muslims in the West. Berry's study examined attitudes towards immigration and immigrant groups, and highlights why it is important to understand the reasons behind these attitudes and behaviours, and the effects that this may have on Muslim's mental health.

### *Muslims in Australia*

In Australia, a major receiving nation of immigrants and international students, Muslims are not immune to negative intergroup attitudes and their potential adverse effects on daily living and wellbeing. Muslims constitute the most ethnically diverse religious group in Australia (Saeed, 2003). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics census data (2006), Muslim-Australians comprise 1.7 % (340,394) of the total Australian population (19,855,288). Of the 340, 394, 2.6 % live in New South Wales, 2.2% in Victoria, 1.4 % in the Australian Capital Territory, 1.2% in Western Australia, 0.7% in South Australia, 0.6% in the Northern Territory and 0.5% in Queensland.

Since 9/11, Australian Muslims have been subjected to ongoing acts of social exclusion. There have been numerous reports of discrimination (Dunn, Forrest, Burnley, & McDonald, 2004; Kabir, 2007; Pollak, 2006; Poynting, 2006; Poynting & Mason, 2006). Recent examples of social exclusion include protests against the development of Muslim schools in Carrara, Queensland (Mercer, 2008; Pierce, 2008) and in Bankstown (Lucchinelli, 2008) and Camden, both located in Sydney (Cregan, 2007; Cregan & Varcoe, 2007; Lambert-Patel & Bright, 2008).



Muslims have also been vulnerable to disparaging views espoused by the government of the time (Price, 2006). The inappropriate use of existing laws such as the recent case where an Indian-born Muslim doctor practicing medicine in Queensland on a temporary work visa, Dr Mohamed Haneef, was wrongfully charged and detained for a month in Brisbane in 2007, had his visa cancelled and was eventually deported, over suspected links to terrorists in the UK (Maley, 2008). This type of treatment is of particular concern to the Australian economy, when it is government policy to call upon skilled migrants who are educated and speak fluent English to come to Australia and fill in the skills shortages gap.

#### *What Do Australians Think of Muslims?*

In 2007, Issues Deliberation Australia/America (IDAA, 2007) commissioned a major investigation on the views of Muslim and non-Muslim Australians about each other. Some key findings were that 50% of respondents rarely or never had contact with Muslim people, 59% wanted to see immigrants assimilate and learn to live and behave like the majority of Australians, 26% felt it was important that everyone should dress like other Australians on a day to day basis, 48% believed Muslims have a negative impact on Australia's social harmony and 47% on national security, 30% wanted to see intakes of Middle Eastern immigrants decreased and 32% wanted the level of Muslim immigration decreased generally. The more pessimistic Australians saw Muslims threatening the essence of Australia's democracy, system of government, separation of church and state, laws, basic rights and freedoms of worship, dress and movement, and the general level of peace and harmony.

These perceptions are surprising considering Australia's history with Muslim immigration which dates back to the 1800s and the Afghani camel transport business (Abdul Khaliq Fazal, 2001, as cited in Saeed, 2003). However, there is evidence that after the participants engaged in a weekend of intergroup contact and discussions, there was an increase from 42% to 71% of those who endorsed that they would more likely welcome and

respect people from different cultures and accept their freedom to live by their own traditions, with declines in numbers across all the categories listed above (IDAA, 2007).

*Effects of Social Exclusion on Muslim's Sense of Belonging and Mental Wellbeing*

Noble (2005) aptly surmises that Muslims' sense of belonging and their status as adequate and legitimate social participants is being challenged by an unfortunate series of world events marring intergroup relations between Muslims and non-Muslims. Previously Muslims were invisible as they went about their daily life, and now they are visible and salient and yet their views are ignored (Sayad, 2004 as cited in Noble, 2005). Their individual differences are often unnoticed in the face of social stereotypes and they have been reduced to a single label such as terrorist, rapist or Arab (Poynting & Noble, 2004) in Australia, while South East Asians have been the major targets in the UK (Poynting & Mason, 2007).

Wise and Ali (2008) argue that the inability of many Muslim-Australians to integrate has a lot to do with the levels of racism and discrimination that currently exist in Australian society. Moreover, they add that social and economic marginalization, not Muslims' religious or cultural values, preclude Muslim-Australians from integrating into Australian society. They conclude that Muslims find a sense of belonging, self worth and identity within their own communities. This withdrawal to community enclaves for self-protection, and support is well-documented (Ward & Kennedy, 1993) and may be more important for those facing discrimination (Van Oudenhoven, Ward, & Masgoret, 2006). This also illustrates the influence that majority groups can exert on minority group's behaviours by showing how host nation policies and practices can force minority members to withdraw to their community enclaves.

While there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that Muslims in Western societies are potential targets of prejudice and discrimination, there has been very limited research examining the intergroup processes that are taking place and the contact effects on

Muslim's psychological wellbeing. Khawaja (2007) provides one of the few known studies investigating the psychological distress of Muslim immigrants in Australia. In her study 280 Muslim immigrants residing in Brisbane, Australia completed a battery of questionnaires in either English or Arabic language. The participants were recruited from gatherings at the mosques or other cultural events. Those who completed the questionnaires emerged as educated and proficient with English language. However, those who were single or on temporary visa were more distressed than the others. Factors such as, perceived difficulties with English language, lack of social support and a tendency to use emotional and avoidance coping predicted the psychological distress of the Muslim immigrants. Further, some emotional difficulties in the form of sadness, apprehension, worries and somatic complaints were reported. Although, on average the duration of participants' stay in Australia was a decade, feelings of personal inadequacy and social discomfort were experienced by the Muslim immigrants. Twenty seven percent of the participants were unemployed. Sadly, underemployment is not uncommon among overseas-qualified immigrants, thereby adding stress to the list of challenges immigrants already face during resettlement (Mak & Barker, 2006).

The recent global financial crisis may further increase Muslims' concerns about their employment opportunities. In today's climate Muslim immigrants could face additional barriers in seeking employment and career advancement. While the adverse effects of unemployment and underemployment on individuals and their families are obvious, Australia as a nation also suffers if it is unable to utilize fully the skills and qualifications of Muslims at a time when, despite the fragile international economy, there are still substantial skills shortages in certain occupations in Australia, such as those in the health and education sectors (Mak & Barker, 2008).

*The Effects of Ongoing Problematic Relations on the Australian Economy*

With respect to the recent global financial crisis, a further consideration is the possibility of losing major global markets and the impact that would have on Western nations' economy. Australia is a major provider of the highly competitive and lucrative international education industry, which has become its top services export industry, bringing in A\$15.5 billion in 2008 (Australian Education International, 2009). A potential downturn of such a market due to the lack of customer satisfaction, such as strained intergroup relations between Muslim international students and the hosts, could impact adversely on the Australian economy.

Australia's top five source countries for international students are China, India, South Korea, Malaysia and Hong Kong, with continued strength growths from India, North Africa and the Middle East (Australian Education International, 2005). Although religion is not identified in student applications, we can provide an estimate using the data from countries that have sizeable numbers of Muslims, or that are predominantly Muslim. This includes North Africa and the Middle East (7,076), Sub Sahara Africa (50% of 7,684 = 3842), Southern and Central Asia (75% of 42,429 = 31,821), Malaysia (19,342) and Indonesia (16,042), which is a total of 78,123 out of 344,815, therefore approximately 22% of international students coming to Australia could potentially be Muslim, which is a much higher proportion than Muslim immigrants. Australian universities need to ascertain and offer culturally appropriate services and environments for these students or risk losing them and the funds they provide to competitors. Problematic intercultural relations and heightened stress experienced by Muslim individuals and communities in Australia, could affect not only Australia's social fabric but also its financial bottom line.

#### *Review of the Intergroup Contact and Prejudice Literature*

In order to gain a better understanding of the process and consequences of intergroup contact, the links between contact and prejudice, and factors that alter levels of prejudice, the

next section will examine three dominant theories within the intergroup contact literature. They are the Intergroup Contact Hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew, 1998), the Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 1985, 1996), and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

### *Intergroup Contact Hypothesis*

Allport's (1954) seminal Contact Hypothesis has inspired a flurry of research exploring intergroup contact and prejudice. The tenant of this hypothesis is that increased intergroup contact itself does not guarantee harmony. Rather, only the types of contact incorporating the following four conditions - common goals, intergroup co-operation, equal status between groups, and support of the authorities, law or custom – would lead to more positive appraisals between groups, improved relations between groups, more positive attitudinal outcomes, and lower levels of prejudice and conflict (Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Subsequent research has generally shown that the quality of intergroup encounters plays a more important role than the quantity of the contact in intergroup attitudes, and that increased contact, under certain conditions, improves relations between groups (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Stephan et al., 2000). Notably, the 2007 Environics Survey (Adams, 2009) conducted has shown that as the general Canadian population's personal contact with Muslims increases, their impressions of Islam become more positive.

While there have been variations of what quality contact conditions entail (Amir, 1969), Pettigrew (1998) suggests the following four conditions can better explain how positive intergroup relations may occur: learning about out-groups that corrects negative views, positively reinforced behaviour modification that leads to attitude changes, generating affective ties (such as friendship) and ingroup reappraisal of their existing norms and customs to be more inclusive of outgroup worldviews.

Tredoux and Finchilescu (2007) have argued that the mere presence or encounters between racial groups do not imply meaningful contact. These authors use the example of South Africa and apartheid to explain that the contact hypothesis may not necessarily generalize to real world applications in all situations. Dixon and Durrheim (2003) have observed that self-segregation can also occur. In their observations of beach attendance patterns of black and white citizens at a South African beach, the researchers found that white and black individuals arrived and left at different times, and when there were present at the same time, they sat in different areas, thus minimizing contact encounters. As Muslims dress conservatively, they may avoid bikini clad, topless and naked beach goers and therefore avoid such encounters or locations.

#### *Integrated Threat Theory of Prejudice*

There is a substantial body of research suggesting that perceptions of threat are important determinants of intergroup attitudes and could constitute important affective mediators of the effect of contact on prejudicial attitudes (Battye & Mak, 2008; Esses, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005). In investigating Canadians' attitudes towards multiculturalism in the 1970s, Berry, Kalin, and Taylor (1977) put forward the multicultural hypothesis, which proposes that a sense of confidence or security of one's cultural identity is a psychological precondition for the acceptance of those who are culturally different; conversely, threat to one's identity leads to rejection of the culturally different.

Extending from earlier conceptualizations, Stephan and Stephan's (1985) Integrated Threat theory (ITT) purports that perceived threats posed by immigrant groups can lead to prejudicial intercultural attitudes, and that four types of threat - realistic threat, symbolic threat, negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety - could operate in the formation of such attitudes. Realistic threat refers to perceived threat to the welfare, political and economic

power of the ingroup or its members. Symbolic threat occurs when members perceive that their values, beliefs, morals and attitudes that encompass the worldview of their ingroup are threatened. Negative outgroup stereotypes are said to establish a basis for setting up negative expectations. For example, if ingroup members perceive outgroup members as aggressive or untrustworthy, they may feel threatened by the prospect of dealing with them. Intergroup anxiety is understood to occur when members perceive negative outcomes for their group and themselves, such as being rejected, ridiculed or embarrassed.

Stephan et al. (2005) have isolated the four threats outlined in ITT in an experimental study, and found that a combination of realistic and symbolic threats, negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety led to negative attitudes of outgroup members. ITT has generally been supported by a range of correlational and experimental studies (for a review see Esses et al., 1998; Stephan et al.). In an Australian study by Islam and Jahjah (2001), the authors found that perceived threat was the best predictor of attitudes towards Arabs and Asians, followed by stereotypes and negative affect, whereas negative affect was the greatest predictor of attitudes towards Aboriginals.

The terrorist attacks since 9/11 and the subsequent acts of prejudice and discrimination have left both Muslims and non-Muslims feeling threatened and anxious. ITT offers one powerful explanation to the observed responses from both sides of the divide.

### *Social Identity Theory*

Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) is also influential in the intergroup contact field and can provide insight into understanding individuals' need to belong, and the development and maintenance of their self, group and national identity. SIT is based on the premise that ingroup and outgroup comparisons have favorable and unfavorable consequences that impact on self-esteem. SIT posits there is a tendency for groups to exhibit ingroup bias and favoritism, and outgroup derogation, thus suggesting the

inevitability of some form of prejudice. According to SIT, minority groups who are subjected to negative stereotyping and prejudice can adopt a variety of strategies to change their social identity and restore their self-esteem. These include individual mobility, where the individual leaves his or her group and attempts to move to the higher status group; social creativity, where the individual redefines elements of comparison; and social competition, where the group redefines elements of comparison (Tajfel, 1978, as cited in Ward et al., 2001). SIT researchers interested in intercultural relations would conduct investigations on the internal mental processes of social interactions between members of the host community and various sojourner groups, how prejudice arises, transition between groups, and how membership affects self-esteem (Ward et al.).

Outgroup members' social identity may be adversely affected by outgroup stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (Ward et al., 2001). Ward et al. have observed that while SIT emphasizes that individuals strive for positive self-identity through social categorization, comparison and ingroup favoritism, immigrants' and sojourners' efforts to integrate into their new society, or move to a higher status group, may be futile. This highlights that incongruent host nation policies and immigrant actions can have detrimental effects on minority group members. If integration and adaptation outcomes are dependent on a context of acceptance or non-acceptance by the dominant culture, then research needs to examine if and how this is achievable for Muslims in Western societies in today's climate.

#### *The Impact of Intergroup Prejudice on Muslims' Mental Health*

Prejudice and discrimination can potentially have detrimental and far-reaching effects on not only a community's social cohesion, but particularly the psychological wellbeing of those targeted. Media such as television, radio and newspaper, and the constant barrage of negative stories about Muslims, have created a negative stereotype and enabled the widespread reach of Islamophobia. Wise and Ali (2008) refer to the work of Allport (1954) to



explain how the various manifestations of Islamophobia, including fear, hatred, anxiety, disgust, misunderstanding, denigration, can be described as prejudicial.

Experiencing higher levels of perceived discrimination and acculturative stress has been found to be associated with higher levels of psychological distress, depression, anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms in minority group members (Fernando, 1993; Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Furnham & Shiekh, 1993; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Horenczyk, & Schmitz, 2003; Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, & Reuter, 2006; Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007; Mak & Nesdale, 2001; Rahman & Rollock, 2004). Constantine, Okazaki and Utsey (2004) found that the stress associated with being a target of racism adds another dimension to the acculturative stress of African international students in the US. In a multi-national study of over 5000 migrant youth, Berry, Phinney, Sam, and Vedder (2006) found that discrimination undermined successful psychological and sociocultural adaptation.

What can be surmised from the review of the contact and prejudice theories thus far is that Muslims and non-Muslims may be experiencing perceived threat and anxiety since 9/11 and the subsequent acts of terrorism, discrimination and prejudice. Majority group members may hold negative stereotypes about Muslims, perceive a threat to their welfare, political and economic power and their values, beliefs, morals and attitudes, thereby acting hostile and feeling anxious in the intergroup contact situation. Evidence that some of these issues exist has been reviewed earlier under the Australia Deliberates study (IDAA, 2007).

SIT highlights minority group members' sense of belonging, cultural identity, and social categorization. Notably, both Adams (2009) and the Pew Research Center (2006) found rising Muslim identity among Canadian and Western European Muslims, although the overwhelming majority would condemn Islamic extremists. If Muslims are unable to seek an identity with their host nation because of its policies or practices, or because they are afraid of rejection, and they are challenged to seek a group identity based on the barrage of negative

stereotyping from media sources, they may withdraw from society or experience reduced self-esteem and mental health. Additionally, Muslims' social identity and self esteem are also affected by prejudice, discrimination and negative outgroup stereotypes.

### *Review of the Acculturation Literature*

Experiences with negative intergroup contact and real or perceived prejudice may affect Muslims' level of participation in Western societies, and pose additional stressors for Muslim immigrants, international students, and other sojourners in their acculturation. According to Berry (2005), acculturation refers to the psychological and cultural changes that occur when two or more individuals or cultural groups make contact; the acculturation process is characterized by behavioral changes occurring at the individual level, and that intergroup changes involve mutual accommodation, leading to longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between the groups. Acculturative stress is commonly reported among members of minority ethnocultural groups in their cross-cultural transition, and often manifests as psychosomatic and other psychological symptoms (Sam & Berry, 2006).

This section will review the dominant approaches to acculturation and acculturative stress - Berry's (2001) framework of acculturation strategies, Ward's (1996) acculturation model distinguishing between psychological and sociocultural adjustment, Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) general model of stress and coping, and Bochner's (1982) culture learning model.

### *The Macro and Individual Perspectives of Acculturation*

The influential work of Berry and his colleagues (Berry, 1990, 1999, 2005, 2006; Sam & Berry, 2006) is embedded within the stress, coping and adaptation paradigm (this paradigm will be discussed shortly within the paper). Berry's framework offers a macro and individual level perspective on the acculturation and adaptation process. The macro level perspective suggests that the political, economic and demographic factors of one's society of origin, and

the policies, social support and attitudes of the host society, impact on the individual's acculturation experience. At the individual level, prior to acculturation, moderating factors such as religion, language, culture distance, migration motivation and expectations, could impact on the acculturation process and subsequent adaptation. During acculturation, moderating factors such as social support, coping strategies and resources, societal attitudes including the appraisal and reactions to those attitudes, and acculturation strategies, could impact on the acculturating individuals (Sam & Berry, 2006).

*Acculturation Strategies and the Impact on Adaptation*

According to Berry (2005), acculturation strategies affect psychological wellbeing. He posits four types of acculturation strategies that individuals may opt for during their acculturative process - integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. Integration occurs when individuals strive to maintain their own cultural heritage while also maintaining contact with the dominant culture, and has been found to be the most preferred and successful strategy (Berry; Ho, Au, Bedford, & Cooper, 2002). Assimilation happens when individuals become completely immersed into the dominant culture and move away from their culture of origin. Separation takes place when individuals hold onto their own traditional culture and avoid interaction with others. Marginalization occurs when individuals hold little interest in either maintaining their cultural heritage or that of the dominant group, which can be due to reasons of exclusion or discrimination.

Assimilation and separation strategies have been found to have intermediate levels of success whereas marginalization has been found to be the least successful adaptation strategy, contributing to poor wellbeing (Phinney, Horenezyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001; Sam & Berry, 1995, 2006). Additionally, Barry and Grilo (2003, as cited in Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006) suggest that under greater conditions of perceived discrimination, separation and

marginalization acculturation strategies are more likely to be adopted, which can have detrimental effects on mental health.

A major criticism of Berry's model of acculturation strategies is that it does not adequately distinguish between attitudes and behaviours; and that the retention of traditional culture is linked with attitudes and values that are harder to shift, whereas the adoption of host culture is related to acquiring behavioral practices and skills (Amer & Hovey, 2007; Rosenthal, Bell, Demetriou, & Efklides, 1989; Triandis, Kashima, Shimada, & Villareal, 1986). Other researchers have argued that there is insufficient empirical evidence to suggest a distinction between the four acculturation strategies, and that integration may not always be the optimum adaptation strategy (see Rudmin, 2003; Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001). Berry and Sam (2003) have counter-argued the critique by claiming that there is sufficient evidence to the contrary.

Acculturation strategies of Muslims have been investigated. Recently, Vedder, Sam, van de Vijver and Phinney (2006) found that Turkish adolescents (89% being Muslim and 82% second generation migrants) residing in Finland, France, Norway and Sweden, were more likely to present with a separation profile in comparison to the total sample of adolescents across 13 countries where the integration acculturation profile was the most common profile. Amer and Hovey (2007) examined Berry's acculturation strategies with Arab-American Christian and Muslim subgroups and identified differing acculturation strategies and mental health outcomes for these subgroups. They found that Christian respondents reported greater assimilation and integration into American culture and less depression, whereas Muslim respondents were more separated, which was similar to the Vedder et al. (2006) finding. Interestingly they found no significant differences between the groups' desire to select the integration strategy.

Amer and Hover (2007) further suggest Muslims' separation may not be intentional. Instead, Muslims attempting to integrate into mainstream society may face many challenges in being accepted. Amer and Hover therefore question the assumption that integration is the most psychologically adaptive strategy for all groups, which concurs with the view put forward by Rudmin and Admadzadeh (2001). It is conceivable that since the tragic event of 9/11, Muslims who are saliently different may encounter targeted social exclusion and the associated stress that arises, and hence may not always have a legitimate choice of acculturation strategy.

Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997 (as cited in Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006) have observed that immigrants do not necessarily choose to be marginalized, but they are forced into that situation. This is congruent with Wise and Ali's (2008) view of what is currently happening to Muslim-Australians. Thus Muslims' adaptation has to be understood within a context of acceptance or non-acceptance by the dominant culture.

While much of the existing intergroup contact research has focused on the attitudes of the majority group and the existing acculturation research on the experiences of the minority group, Berry and colleagues (Berry et al., 1977; Berry, 2005, 2006) have advocated the mutuality of acceptance among ethnocultural groups in culturally diverse societies. Recently, researchers based in different Western countries (Berry, 2006; Pettigrew, 2008; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006) concur with the importance of considering both sides of the intercultural contact situation. Where the acculturation orientations of minority and dominant group members are not aligned in the contact encounter, acculturating minority group members would experience higher levels of acculturative stress and poorer coping.

Jasinskaja-Lahti et al.'s (2003, as cited in Van Oudenhoven et al., 2006) study with ethnic repatriates in Finland, Germany and Israel found that discordant acculturation preferences were linked to greater perceived discrimination and increased psychological

distress. Conversely, congruent host nation and immigrant acculturation strategies are predictive of positive psychological outcomes (Berry, 2001). In investigating majority and minority members' perspectives on acculturation and prejudice in Germany, Zick, Wagner, van Dick and Petzel (2001) found incongruent views between the two groups. Majority members preferred assimilation for immigrants, and segregation for those they regarded as guests such as refugees who were expected to return to their country of origin, whereas minority members preferred integration and assimilation.

Hopkins, Greenwood, and Birchall's (2007) study based on interviews with British Muslims found that they were wary of contact with Non-Muslims, as this implied assimilation which to some Muslims meant an erosion of religious and social identity. In South Africa, Finchilescu et al. (2007) found that black students considered contact with white students as betrayal and a dissociation from their own group, whereas this view was not held by white students. It is conceivable that majority and minority group members differ in their potential gain or loss from intergroup contact (Tredoux & Finchilescu, 2007). Understanding the different perspectives of majority and minority group members will enhance our knowledge of cohesive contact.

#### *Differentiating between the Psychological and Sociocultural Aspects of Acculturation*

Focusing on the experiences of the acculturating individuals, Ward (1996) proposes that acculturation is best conceptualized as an overarching framework with two empirically distinct arms - those of psychological and sociocultural adjustment. Also situated within the stress and coping paradigm, psychological adjustment refers to affective responses of wellbeing (e.g., satisfaction and depression), and is influenced by life changes, personality, and social support variables (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward). On the other hand, sociocultural adjustment, embedded in the behavioral domain and interpreted within the culture learning perspective, refers to the ability of the individual to engage in effective interactions;

accordingly, it is more affected by contact variables such as culture distance and quality and quantity of host contact (Searle & Ward; Ward; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 2000).

However, it should be noted that intercultural social difficulties can in fact be stressors, whose effect on psychological outcomes could be mediated by adaptive and maladaptive coping responses (see also Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Amer and Hovey (2007) have identified a problem-solving coping style and social support as factors influencing successful adaptation among second generation and early immigrant Arab Americans. In the context of national debates on immigration and multiculturalism in Australia, Mak and Nesdale (2001) found that perceived discrimination and low levels of friendships with Anglo-Australians (but not that of co-ethnic friendships) predicted ethnic Chinese immigrants' psychological distress. Conceivably, social support from and friendships with hosts could be protective of psychological adjustment among minority group members.

#### *The Stress, Coping, and Adaptation Approach*

A dominant theoretical framework dealing with intergroup contact and psychological wellbeing of immigrants and sojourners is the stress, coping and adaptation approach derived from the transactional model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This framework presents the interaction between the person and the environment as dynamic and bidirectional (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986), where stress is "conceptualized as a relationship between the person and the environment, that is appraised by the person as exceeding his or her resources, and as endangering wellbeing" (p.572). The theory identifies cognitive appraisal and coping as mediators in the relationship between stressor and adaptation outcomes. The link between stress events and somatic health and psychological symptoms is well established (DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988; Rice, 1999), but the types of adaptive coping responses used are context specific (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988).

Folkman et al. (1986) assert that coping refers to the individual's cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage the internal and external demands of the person-environment transaction that is appraised as exceeding the person's resources. They highlight two broad categories of coping strategies. The first category is problem-focused coping, which deals directly with the problem, and includes aggressive interpersonal efforts, and cool, rational, and deliberate strategies to problem solve. The second category is emotion-focused coping, which regulates emotion and deals with the negative feelings and can include distancing, self-controlling, positive reappraisal, accepting responsibility, escape avoidance and seeking social support (Folkman et al.).

Accordingly, from a research and applied perspective, when an intergroup contact situation has been deemed threatening to self-esteem or challenging to deal with, understanding the coping response options and strategies used by minority group members could shed light on their mental health outcomes. Research on acculturative stress has explored characteristics of the individual and the situation that hinder or facilitate adaptation during the intergroup contact situation, such as coping styles, social support, cognitive appraisals of change, and quality of relationships with home and host nationals on acculturation outcomes, specifically physical and mental wellbeing (Adelman, 1988; Chataway & Berry, 1989; Furnham & Alibhai, 1985; Ward, Leong & Kennedy, 1998; all cited in Ward et al., 2001).

In line with this conceptualization, among acculturating individuals, cognitive appraisals such as intercultural social self-efficacy and social stress appraisals in social interactions have been found to be linked with psychological and acculturative distress, and depression (Constantine et al., 2004; Mak & Neil, 2006; Neil & Mak, 2007; Rahman & Rollock, 2004). Acculturation research has also shown that lack of social support is associated with feelings of homesickness, loneliness and poorer psychological wellbeing



(DeLongis et al., 1988; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2006; Jiali Ye, 2005). Moreover, it is the quality rather than number of social support networks - family, friends, acquaintances and the wider community - that has been found to moderate the effects of stress in predicting depression, and to have positive consequences for mental and physical wellbeing (Dao, Lee, & Chang, 2007; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al.; Jung et al., 2007; Neil & Mak; Ward, 1996).

*The Culture Learning Approach to Sociocultural Adaptation*

The culture learning approach (Bochner, 1986; Furnham & Bochner, 1982) focuses on sociocultural determinants of acculturation and the importance of learning intercultural social skills in facilitating cross-cultural transition (Mak, Westwood, Ishiyama, & Barker, 1999; Tredoux & Finchilescu, 2007; Ward et al., 2001). This approach posits that the everyday social difficulties that individuals in cross-cultural transition experience – an often reported part of culture shock – can be addressed by the acquisition of the basic social skills and behaviours of their new cultural environment over time (Bochner). Unfamiliarity with aspects of the new society can result in social and emotional difficulties for the acculturating individual (Furnham & Bochner).

Within the culture learning approach, the culture distance hypothesis envisages that individuals belonging to similar cultures to the host culture should experience fewer difficulties acculturating, and those from more different cultures should experience greater struggles (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Therefore, large culture differences based on individualism-collectivism, religion, language, attitudes to authority, the legal system, cultural norms, and traditions (Williams & Best, 1990, as cited in Ward et al., 2001) may contribute to poorer mental health outcomes for acculturating immigrants and sojourners from such backgrounds.

Research associated with the culture learning approach has focused on the importance of understanding intercultural friendships and communication repertoires in the adaptation

process, as well as the acquisition of culturally relevant behavioral skills. Various investigations have shown the importance of the quantity and quality of contact with host nationals, friendship networks, language competence and culture distance, in relation to cross-cultural adaptation (Bochner, 1982; Ward et al., 2001). Research has shown that low levels of contact and friendships with locals could be linked to depression among culturally diverse newcomers (Fritz et al., 2008; Mak & Neil, 2006; Neil & Mak, 2007).

Galchenko and van de Vijver (2007) found that the culture distance in exchange students in Moscow from China, North Korea and countries in sub-Saharan Africa was associated with poorer psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Constantine et al. (2004) suggest that African students face a particularly large gap between their ethnic culture and the American culture, and were more likely to be targets of racism; these could result in high levels of acculturative stress. Moreover, international students from collectivistic cultures are often reluctant to seek formal counseling services, and the support services available may lack cultural relevance (Constantine et al.; Dao et al., 2007; Fritz et al. 2008).

Strategic interventions presented as culture learning opportunities in groups, rather than traditional one-on-one counseling services, are likely to be more acceptable to acculturating individuals from collectivistic backgrounds who are motivated to learn about the social rules for success in Western societies (Mak, Westwood, & Ishiyama, 1994; Westwood, Mak, Barker, & Ishiyama, 2000). Recent applied research on the **Excellence in Cultural Experiential Learning and Leadership (EXCELL)** Program, an intercultural social skills training program, indicates its benefits for enhancing the intercultural social confidence and interaction skills among international students and immigrants in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the UK (Ho, Holmes, Cooper, 2004; Mak & Barker, 2004, 2008; Mak & Buckingham, 2007).

The above review of the major acculturation theories and research shows the importance of host nation policies, practices and attitudes in relation to immigrant and sojourner wellbeing. Muslims who are saliently identifiable in their cultural distance from the dominant groups in the host society – as evident by their religion, collectivist values, dress, food and traditions - may not always have legitimate choice of acculturation strategy. They may even be rejected when attempting to integrate or be forced into marginalization and this has been linked to poorer wellbeing and psychological distress. The stress, coping and adaptation literature suggests that challenging social encounters, such as experiences of direct or indirect prejudice, may be particularly harmful to Muslims who have poorer social self-efficacy and coping skills, and more negative social stress appraisals. Negative intergroup contact adds an additional layer of acculturative stress for Muslims, and impacts on mental health outcomes of vulnerable individuals.

#### *Implications for Social Policy and Practice*

Having reviewed the literature on intergroup contact, prejudice, acculturation and mental health of Muslims in Western societies, this section will consider the review's implications for multicultural policy and practice. We will discuss strategies for improving intergroup relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, drawing on examples of Australian government initiatives, and the role of the media in redressing negative stereotypes. We will also discuss practice implications including intercultural training and particularly training for allied health professionals, and the need for culturally appropriate functions at workplaces and educational institutions to minimize segregation and self-segregation.

#### *National and Local Government Initiatives*

Federal government initiatives such as the Living in Harmony program (LIHP) and National Action Plan grants in Australia, which assist incorporated not-for-profit organizations address issues of cultural, racial and religious intolerance, play a vital role in

redressing the strained relationships between Australian Muslims and non-Muslims (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, (DIAC)). The LIHP is designed to target people living in a community or local government area and promotes respect, fairness, inclusion and a sense of belonging for all (DIAC).

Wise and Ali (2008) recently completed a report investigating local government grass-roots initiatives aimed to improve these relations. They found that funding was a key barrier to developing capacity building initiatives, and that in the community sector Muslim-Australians adopted much of the responsibility followed by partnerships with Christian church-based groups and interfaith activities, youth services and Migrant Resource Centers. Sadly, local councils in Australia have been doing very little, as they claim that they did not want to single out particular religious communities, they did not feel they had a role if there were no tensions present in their region, and there were no partnerships between councils to pool financial and human resources. On a positive note, Wise and Ali have observed that cross-cultural awareness and introduction to Islam training have been introduced into some workplaces.

The intergroup initiatives implemented include interfaith and diversity activities, enhancing discourses between Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and secular NGOs. Further, there were activities such as peace celebrations, open house activities at mosques and places of worship, educational seminars and lectures, school presentations, international women's day activities, and production of documentaries. Overall, these initiatives have achieved favourable outcomes and an increased amount of intergroup contact (Wise & Ali, 2008).

It is encouraging to note that even for encounters between Muslim and non-Muslim Australians over one weekend in the Australia Deliberates Study (IDAA, 2007), reappraisal of intergroup views has been shown to occur. Future projects could be managed more effectively to ensure that they include the four conditions identified by Pettigrew (1998) -

learning about outgroups that corrects negative views, positively reinforced behavior modification that leads to attitude changes, generating affective ties (such as friendships), and ingroup reappraisal of their existing norms and customs to be more inclusive of outgroup worldviews – to help foster more positive intergroup relations.

Another political strategy to foster inclusion and to show that Muslims are valued is the establishment of consultative committees which target Muslim groups, and Muslim Advisory Councils. Jon Stanhope, Chief Minister of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government, leads the only State and Territory Government that currently has such a council. Jon Stanhope (2005) reported

I believe that the members of the Muslim Advisory Council will, between them, alert the ACT Government to any emerging concerns among our ethnically, linguistically and culturally diverse Muslim communities, and help the Government decide how as a community we can best respond, to stop emerging concerns turning into entrenched ones.

Stanhope (2005) has also regularly supported Muslims in Canberra publically and stated “he cannot and will not tolerate the marginalisation or exclusion of Canberra Muslims”. Such public stances by leaders would contribute to fostering strong community ties and social cohesion between all members.

This political strategy is another example where the ACT Government has taken leadership to ensure all its citizens feel empowered and valued and that their voice mattered. This also reflects the dominant majority's commitment to integration thereby facilitating adaptive acculturation and wellbeing for Muslims in Canberra. SIT would also argue that Muslims in this region seeking a positive social identity within their region (Canberra) would be able to do so more easily, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging, self-esteem and wellbeing.

*The Role of the Media in Redressing Negative Stereotypes of Muslims*

The media could represent another major player in redressing the negative stereotypes of Muslims. It is important they discontinue portraying Muslims as having different values to Westerners, as terrorists and the feared others. Some circles in the powerful Hollywood conglomerate have taken an exemplary stance by producing movies that are redressing this imbalance and portraying fairer representations of Muslims. Some recent movies include *Body of Lies*, *Stop Loss*, *Rendition* and *Traitor*. However, a well-known Australian movie reviewer has reported that these movies have not performed well at the box office to date as audiences do not seem to want to tackle post 9/11 stories just yet (Stratton, 2008).

A recently aired episode of the highly popular Simpsons television show entitled "Mypods and Boomsticks," has also challenged stereotypes, intolerance and anti-Muslim prejudice when Bart befriends a Muslim boy named Bashir, whom Homer suspects of terrorism. Ms Nihad Awad, Executive Director of the Council on American Islamic Relations, has praised this episode for reconfirming America's values in which citizenship is about finding common ground and building a better society (Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2008).

ITT argues that perceived threats including negative stereotypes are linked to prejudice. Therefore when movies, television shows and news items perpetuate stereotypes of Muslims as frightening and threatening, this will exacerbate the fear and anxiety that already exists, thus leading to prejudice during the intergroup encounter. As movies generally depict social and political issues of the time, and more well-known celebrities are pushing for change, in time this will have an impact on enhancing intergroup relations and social cohesion in the West. The influential American movie industry that penetrates globally across cultures, as well as local media initiatives will go a long way to redressing the negative attitudes and stereotypes about Muslims.

*Intercultural Training*

One useful and increasingly popular approach to improving understanding and communication between groups is intercultural or cross-cultural training (Bean, 2008; Quintec, 2008). Cultural competence provides knowledge, awareness and skills to enable communities to live and work together more effectively (Bean). A range of intercultural interaction initiatives has become available to facilitate the social inclusion of ethnic and religious minority groups in various English-speaking countries (Jung et al., 2007; Mak & Barker, 2004, 2006; Quintec; Westwood et al., 2000).

Variations of intercultural training programs have already been used effectively in education institutions and workplaces with substantial concentrations of individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, or if the organizations' clientele include large numbers of CALD populations. Such workplaces may include: child care, education, health and mental health, retail and key service delivery outlets, academia, and public sector employment. Cross-cultural training that includes components of Islam awareness, is an important vehicle for improving relations between Muslim and non-Muslims in Western countries such as Australia (Wise & Ali, 2008).

Sociocultural competence training, such as EXCELL, represents strategic intercultural training focused on the acquisition of intercultural social skills and enhancement of intercultural relations, while validating participants' original cultural identity (Mak & Barker, 2004). EXCELL can be offered in workplace settings as a productive diversity course or embedded into multicultural educational curriculum to enhance intercultural interactions (Mak, Barker, Logan, & Millman, 1999; Westwood et al., 2000). EXCELL has been effectively incorporated into a job placement program for unemployed culturally diverse immigrant jobseekers in Australia to enhance their self-efficacy in job search and intercultural interactions (Mak & Barker, 2008). In Australia, cross-cultural training derived

from EXCELL, has also been successfully embedded into the teaching of multicultural classes (Mak et al., 1999; Mak, DePercy, & Kennedy, 2008; Mak & Buckingham, 2007) and training of university orientation student leaders (Mak, 2007), and found to benefit students from both majority and minority ethnocultural backgrounds.

EXCELL-type programs are potentially useful for increasing quality social interactions and fostering friendships between Muslims and non-Muslims in educational as well as work settings. For optimal effectiveness, this type of training should best be co-facilitated by leaders - one from a Muslim and the other from a non-Muslim background, and include participants from both groups. The use of the train-the-trainer model and manuals for facilitators and participants, such as in the case of EXCELL, establishes a community of practice that enhances the sustainability of the intercultural training program.

#### *Training for Allied Health Professionals*

In order to provide culturally responsive services to Muslims with mental health problems or who are at-risk, there is a need to enhance the cultural competency of mental and allied health professionals. There are demonstrable benefits of improving the mainstream professionals' ability to work with people from CALD backgrounds (Khawaja & Lathopolous, 2008; Khawaja & Rabello, 2007).

Cultural awareness and competence training for allied health professionals generally complies with the tenets of the intergroup contact research. The most successful training outcomes would be expected in programs not limited to information giving about the outgroup, which in this context is Muslims. Affective factors such as reducing anxiety and increasing empathy and perspective taking could mediate intergroup contact effect on prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Pettigrew and Tropp have recently proposed a causal sequence whereby initial anxiety reduction with intergroup contact must occur first,



and then increased empathy, perspective taking and knowledge of the outgroup can successfully contribute to prejudice reduction.

Intercultural friendships often provide opportunities for individuals to empathize with and take the perspective of the outgroup; with this new view of the outgroup, prejudice is likely to decline (Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007). Pettigrew et al. have indicated that simply having ingroup friends who have outgroup friends, is linked with diminished prejudice. Friendships, increased empathy, and perspective taking, as well as information and skills acquired during cultural awareness and competence training of allied health professions, can have wide ranging direct and indirect benefits in terms of improving intergroup contact and reducing prejudice. This is especially the case when participants in the training programs represent a combination of cultural and multi-faith backgrounds.

#### *Cultural Sensitivity and Responsiveness in Education and Work Settings*

Policies, multicultural education programs, and staff training aiming to increase cultural sensitivity and responsiveness in education and work settings could facilitate an increased quantity of favorable contact among culturally diverse workers and students, including that between Muslims and non-Muslims. Moreover, at the same time such activities and policies would minimize self-segregation of minority group members. Research has indicated that international students on Western university campuses are often subjected to late night loud partying and messy communal kitchens; have had to turn down offers to attend culturally inappropriate social activities organised by student union bodies that involve drinking alcohol (a forbidden drink for Muslims); and have been exposed to the occasional intimate activities that occur between couples on university grounds and these events have been linked to higher levels of distress to Muslim and other students from conservative cultural backgrounds (Asmar, 2005; Asmar, Proude, & Inge, 2004; Ho, 2006; Spencer-Oatey & Zhaoning, 2006). Cultural sensitivity and inclusiveness on university campuses would

include making available a wider range of activities, including alcohol-free events, and labeling of ingredients in meals served in eating outlets on campus, which can accommodate the cultural practices of Muslim students and others with special dietary needs and preferences.

Many workplace functions also impose segregation for Muslim employees as they involve events that include alcohol, or foods that have been in contact with pork (a forbidden food). Muslim males are often unable to participate in work lunches held on Friday - the last day of the Australian working week - as they must observe their weekly Friday prayer at their local mosque. The development of more culturally sensitive and inclusive functions and activities would foster greater friendships, understanding and possibly empathy which are known determinants in positive intergroup attitudes and relations.

#### *Suggestions for Future Research*

Our review of the existing empirical literature on intergroup relations and Muslims' mental health has indicated the paucity of specific research in the area. However, we note that research addressing the mental health and wellbeing of various Muslim communities has commenced. Examples include looking at religion as support and a coping strategy (Asmar, 2005; Asmar et al., 2004; Khawaja, 2007), assisting psychotherapists deal with Arabic speaking or Muslim clients (Ali, 2006; Awad & Ladhani, 2007; Daneshpour, 1998), women's mental health (Douki, Zineb, Nacef, & Halbreich, 2007), and in the development of culturally sensitive instruments for measuring religious constructs (Amer & Hood, 2007; Dover, Miner, & Dowson, 2007).

Importantly, our review has identified a substantial scope for future research utilizing theories of intergroup contact, prejudice, and acculturation, as well as applied research in needs assessment and program evaluation.

#### *Intergroup Contact, Prejudice, and Acculturation Research*

Consistent with Pettigrew's (2008) suggestions for future research directions for intergroup contact effects on prejudice, further investigations could continue with the examination of Allport's and Pettigrew's conditions for enhancing Muslim and non-Muslim contact, and assess if all are necessary conditions in prejudice reduction. Further research using Muslim respondents and Muslims in presented scenarios, will enhance our understanding of the current intergroup relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in various settings and countries.

Research exploring the four types of threat proposed by ITT – realistic threat, symbolic threat, negative stereotypes and intergroup anxiety – could use Muslim respondents, and use them in the presented scenarios in order to have a better understanding of the current real life situation, from both perspectives.

Future acculturation research could examine host nation and Muslims' acculturation strategies to assess the legitimacy of the four choices for Muslims and the impact of differing acculturation strategies on individuals' mental health outcomes. Research could also explore barriers to adaptive acculturation and determine if there are unique acculturative stressors to Muslims. Additionally, the use coping strategies, such as problem solving focused or emotion solving focused could be investigated in order to determine the effectiveness and disadvantages of each strategy. Importantly, clinical and other support services can be tailored to assist those that use emotion solving focused strategies.

#### *Applied Research on Needs Assessment and Evaluation*

Applied research is clearly needed to identify at-risk Muslim groups: women, men, youth, older persons and specific cultures. There is a need to determine the main issues (including intercultural relations) affecting their mental health in order to improve target services. Surveys and interviews could be conducted in highly populated Muslim regions to

determine these key issues. Training of allied health workers and mental health providers to be more culturally responsive and competent would complement this work.

Another important area for future applied research is evaluation of the outcomes of multicultural policies and programs. In particular, research could examine the efficacy of interventions aimed at reduction of prejudice and or enhancement in intercultural understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims. Evaluation research could investigate the effectiveness of intercultural social skills training for fostering friendships between Muslims and non-Muslims, improvement of recent Muslim immigrants' employment outcomes, and increasing Muslim students' social integration and opportunities for academic success. The efficacy of multicultural education programs and cultural competence training for health professionals and others providing service to Muslim clients would also merit investigation.

### *Conclusion*

We have reviewed how theories of intergroup contact, prejudice, and acculturation could enhance our understanding of the contemporary issue of intergroup tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in Western societies. This problematic intergroup contact situation threatens global diplomatic relations, and lucrative trade markets such as education, tourism, export and import markets, thus impacting on the economy and social cohesion. Moreover, unsatisfactory intergroup relations undermine Muslims' social, legal and human rights, their ability to acculturate, and their mental health. Understanding the factors and process of favorable contact, successful acculturation, and effective interventions for prejudice reduction and intercultural learning, will go a long way towards redressing the imbalance that has occurred. Supportive host nation policies and practices, media initiatives dispelling negative stereotypes of Muslims and cross-cultural training in all workforces that employ or deal with Muslims are essential strategies in restoring social cohesion and minimizing mental health issues for at-risk Muslims. Further theory-based and applied

research on intergroup relations and Muslims' mental health in Western societies can inform social policy and pave the way forward for improved social cohesion and the wellbeing of all citizens.

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